

Virginia Agricultural BMP Advisory Committee
Meeting 9:30 a.m., October 25, 2011
DRAFT Summary

TAC members in attendance:

Member	Representing	Member	Representing
Megen Dalton	VACDE	Brad Jarvis	VT EXT
Mark Hollberg	DCR	Wayne Turley	SR Con. Tech.
Diane Beyer	Regulatory Local Assistance	Emily Horsley	FSA
Robert Bradford	Area II Chair (Proxy)	Dean Cumbia	VDOF
Emily Nelson	CB Cons. Tech. (Proxy)	Libby Norris	CBF
John Fallon	DCR Nut. Man. (Proxy)	Ward Robens	Area I Chair
Stephanie Martin	DCR	Sharyl Walker	NRCS
Darrell Marshall	VDACS	Chad Wentz	NRCS

The meeting began at 9:30 AM. Gary Moore led and facilitated the discussion that followed. A summary of discussion topics, action items, and significant conclusions are as follows:

- ◆ Stephanie Martin provided an update on the voluntary BMP Pilot Project; the six districts met Monday Oct. 24 to exchange information and ideas. The Tracking Program has been modified to accommodate quicker recording of less data about each BMP, and is currently being tested by the district staff. Capturing data on “Functional Equivalents” seems to be the big issue presently. A functional equivalent of the NRCS fence standard was discussed. A fence may be fully functional at keeping livestock out of the stream, but not meet NRCS standards. The question is what reductions would it generate in the Chesapeake Bay Program model run. Many voluntarily installed fences may not have been installed to NRCS standards but perform the function of controlling and excluding livestock just as well as a fence that meets standards. Conservation tillage is another issue differentiating as to the level of conservation tillage (mulch till, strip till, etc.) . will be an issue as well

The draft summary of the August 18, 2011 TAC meeting was reviewed and approved with no additional changes noted.

Resource Management Plans (RMP): Stephanie Martin provided an update on the Resource Management Plan activities. The effort is continuing but is complicated. They are trying to develop a regulatory process for voluntary participation. Defining “safe harbor”, who writes the RMP, who assesses the in field practices and certifies practices as effective are all still being discussed. Who will issue and how long will safe harbor be certified for? The subcommittee that is developing the assessment tool is making progress and a draft assessment tool should be available soon.

- ◆ **NRCS conservation programs update:** Chad Wentz provided an update on federal fiscal year 2011 accomplishments: NRCS authorized 1,058 contracts worth over \$29 million that will impact over 150,000 acres. For FY 2012 (that began October 1, 2011) there will be some changes to NRCS standards:

There will be a new interim standard: Waste Gasification standard number 735 will be capped at \$100,000 in cost share. A new standard, number 374, Farmstead Energy Improvements, will be available for farmsteads that have already received an energy audit to make some suggested

improvements. Also a new Roofs and Covers standard, number 367, is designed to be used in conjunction with the existing Heavy Use Area Protection standard to protect certain areas from rainfall and the resultant runoff issues. Livestock Shade Structures, Field Waste Storage, Orchard Pest Management, and Ground Water Protection standards will be dropped.

A new risk assessment is being tested that better defines a direct water quality issue versus a transport concern that could impact resources outside of the area of concern.

NRCS has completed and distributed to their employees a series of documents that identify the new conservation planner levels, basically levels one and most of level two have been combined into a new Conservation Planner Designation. If a district employee is already certified as a level 1 planner under the old requirements they will be grandfathered as a new Conservation Planner level 1. NRCS will issue a certificate of completion for all trainings and CEU eligible events. It will be up to the individual to keep track of trainings and CEU events they have completed and they will need to present the certificates of completion before certifications are given or renewed.

New NRCS regional payment schedules are being developed and will be used to make 2012 payments on contracts for the fifteen most used practices in the state. Next year all practices will use the regional payment schedule.

EQIP ranking periods: For applications received as of Jan 31, 2012, ranking will be available 2/27/2012. For applications received as of 03/16/2012, ranking will be available by 3/30/2012. Forestry practices applications received by 12/16/2011 will be ranked by 1/13/2012.

Farm Service Agency (FSA); New CREP signs have been ordered they will be of aluminum and will be distributed via FSA channels. FSA has new aerial photography, and is using it to verify compliance on CREP contracts, then visiting and inspecting those contracts that need compliance spot checks. Emily Horsley will redistribute the CREP rally Questions and Answers, Gary will post on all district e-mail.

BMP Tracking Program Modernization: The voluntary BMP tracking program module is being tested by SWCD users. The voluntary practices require significantly less input making it quicker to input a voluntary practice. There will be another series of computer lab trainings on the Ag BMP Tracking and reporting programs offered in December and early January, stay tuned for specifics for your area.

Old Business

Gary distributed a letter from Tidewater SWCD that requested a second look be taken at the tillage prohibition added to the SL-15A last year.

- ◆ Report from the cover crop subcommittee. Megen Dalton summarized the teleconference that resulted in several draft specifications.
 - SL-15A: The subcommittee recommended removing the existing tillage ban and referencing NRCS standard 329. (*Since the TAC meeting I have been informed that the 329 standard is being revised and probably will specifically prohibit Turbo Tillage.*) Removing the prohibition provides SWCDs with greater flexibility. Neighboring districts that share participants need to talk to each other and work things out. Gary will verify that this will still meet the Chesapeake Bay Program practice requirements to receive nutrient and sediment reductions in model runs.
 - Gary distributed language excerpted from the Code of Virginia sections associated with the establishment and purpose of the Water Quality Improvement Fund and the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund. He is concerned that the TAC be aware of the language that the General Assembly used to define the purpose of the funds they provided.
 - SL- 8H: The TAC supported deleting the \$10/acre bonus payment for biofuel feed stock.

- SL- 8B: The TAC requested that the subcommittee continue to work on this specification. There was support for using a state identification of drought maybe from the Drought Monitoring Task Force at DEQ or the state climatologist. The TAC thought that the reduction in payment from the full rate to the lowest cover crop rate was appropriate and did not need additional work.
- ◆ Report from the Stream Protection Subcommittee: Emily Nelson provided a summary of the Stream Protection subcommittee teleconference and its recommendations.
 - SL-7: The TAC had several suggested language changes to the draft SL-7 that was distributed and discussed; the TAC suggested that it needed more work by the subcommittee.
 - SL-6: The TAC supported the revised SL-6 specification for inclusion in the 2013 program year.
 - CRSL-6: The TAC had several suggested language changes to the draft CRSL-6 that was distributed and discussed; the TAC suggested that it needed more work by the subcommittee.

New Business

- ◆ There was discussion about recommending that WP-4 and WP-4B become Priority Practices rather than Base practices. The 80% PP and 20% base practice split of a district's allocation means that many small SWCDs do not have enough base allocation cost share dollars to approve even one animal waste practice in a program year. For those that do they approve an animal waste practice early in the year and then are out of base cost-share funds limiting their ability to address any additional base practice issues. DCR has been requesting applications and funding animal waste practices with unspent cost share funds from previous years. The submittal of information is due in September and most practices that have been submitted have been funded. There is no guarantee of funding to continue this funding method. Based upon the existing approach the TAC did not feel that the system was broken or should be modified.

The TAC did discuss funding end user litter sheds and determined that the program could not afford to fund sheds that would only be used a short period of time each year if the producer could get litter that year and was unnecessary if he could not get litter.
- ◆ The TAC discussed extending the carry over time frame from 1 year to two years. Staff felt that a major cause of delay was the difference between the July 1 and October 1 state and federal (respectively) start of the fiscal years. Shenandoah Valley SWCD requests that applicants with a WP-4 or 4B request that needs federal cost share to move forward already have an approved EQIP contract for the animal waste system before the Board considers VACS cost-share. This allows the producer to begin construction much faster once the state cost share is approved and therefore he is more likely to complete with the two year time frame. It was suggested that NRCS might give additional points to those applicants that indicate they can complete the animal waste practice within two years. The TAC suggested that staff develop some case by case language for a 1 year extension of the carry-over period and bring it back to the TAC for review and comment.
- ◆ There was some discussion about the make up of the TAC, how it was derived, and why certain agricultural groups did not have a representative. Any group that represented a segment of agricultural producers is welcome at the TAC. Many choose not to participate at the meetings, but always get the distributed information, and others have declined to get involved.

Agency Updates

- ◆ **Dept. of Forestry:** Tree seedlings are available from all DOF nurseries. This was a good production year for growing trees. Last year's "Lands for Tomorrow" conference at Longwood Univ. and the local meetings that followed generated lots of communications between conservation organizations. DOF plans to follow up in 2012 with issue oriented field days if grant funds come through. DOF will use some CCPI grant funds to write forest Management Plans in the York and Rappahannock River basins. Aerial surveys after hurricane Irene did not find extensive forest damage as a result of the storm. Todd Groh will be serving as a liaison to NRCS for the next year spending time in both DOF and NRCS state offices.
- ◆ **Chesapeake Bay Foundation CBF**
Fifteen farmers with an age range of from 20 to 60 years participated in the 3-day Tangier Island trip. CBF will be conducting a one day float trip on Smith creek as well as another fishing trip to Tangier in the spring.
- ◆ **Virginia Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services**
There are now three Agricultural Stewardship Act areas. A map was distributed via e-mail. There is a quarantine on Walnut products due to thousand cankers disease. The areas quarantined are: Chesterfield, Henrico, Goochland, Hanover, Powhatan counties, and the cities of Richmond, and Colonial Heights. No walnut products may enter or leave these areas.
- ◆ **Virginia Agricultural Extension**
The general assembly did not approve the proposed restructuring plan and, as a result, twenty-five new agents are going to be hired. Ed Jones who was the Ag. Program leader at North Carolina State Univ. has been hired to be the head of VT Ag. Extension.

Concerns from the Floor

None noted

**The Next TAC meeting will be Tuesday January 4, 2012; 9:30 AM DOF Training Room
Charlottesville, VA**